

The Poetry of John Milton:

Milton's Samson

Milton's original plan for *Paradise Lost* was not for it to be an Epic in genre, but a five-act Tragedy entitled *Adam Unparadised*. It is perhaps not that unusual, then, that Milton writes of Samson's final hours in the form of a drama. But this play is a *closet drama*, meant not to be necessarily acted out upon a stage, but read privately, thus encouraging the reader to meditate and ruminate upon the story, perhaps for personal edification. It is uncertain when Milton began writing this work, but he published it in 1671 along with *Paradise Regained*, which some critics consider a *companion piece* to the play. Like Jesus in *Paradise Regained*, Samson is struggling to find the correct life path God would have him follow while undergoing three temptations or challenges. These challenges and the men's responses to them seem to help both men clarify their role in the Divine Plan.

There is also an autobiographical element to this drama. Both Milton and Samson were estranged from their wives, who attempted to reconcile with their husbands. Like Milton, Samson has experienced past victories fighting for God's cause. Both felt betrayed by their fellow countrymen who would not shield them from their enemies, and both experienced blindness, defeat, imprisonment, and ridicule. Both men expressed a sense of depression after their fall. Samson wonders if God has abandoned him and it would not be surprising if Milton struggled with the same questions. Nevertheless, after his fall, Samson does more damage to his enemies than he had previously, and after his fall, Milton published *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* among other works. Ultimately, both men could claim what the Chorus asserts about Samson, that "God [had] not parted from him, as was feared, / But favoring and assisting to the end" (1719–1720).